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Early Days in the Southwest.

My people came to the Mesilla Valley in the early days. They lived at Fort Seldon when they first came to the valley. They had a meat market and run the ferry across the river. We stayed at the Fort a short time then moved to Mesilla or the present Old Mesilla.

In 1877 the worst cold spell came to the Mesilla Valley that was ever known in history; there has never been such a spell since in the valley. The stock froze; grape vines that had been in the valley for more than a hundred years were killed. My father didn't sell any meat for days and days as he couldn't cut it as after a beef was killed it froze so hard a knife was of no use what ever.

"Many of the families decided to leave the Mesilla Valley and go to Las Mimbres. Some twelve families left Old Mesilla in their caritos, which were two wheeled carts, the only mode of travel that the people had at that time. The party settled on the Mimbres River at the present site of Old Town thirty-five miles northeast of Silver City beyond Faywood Hotsprings.

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The families cleared off plots of ground for cultivation. They were making a success of farming and rejoicing that they had come to The Mimbres Rio. The Apaches were waiting for the time to get some good horses and to slaughter their unexpected victims. Victoria deciding that his tribe needed some new 2 mounts raided the colony drove off all the cattle and horses and killed every member of the settlement. Old Town for some time was vacant, but later other settlers came into town.

News soon reached the small town of Mesilla of the disaster that had befallen their relatives and friends. There were many who had planned on going to the Mimbres, still in Mesilla that were rejoicing that they were still alive, and many were sorrowing for those that were gone.

My father in 1875 decided to come to this district of the southwest he settled at "Bras Springs," the present Burro Springs, so called by the Spanish people because the black tail deer came to the springs for water.

When we came here there wasn't any Lordsburg or Deming. Silver City was a small village of around two hundred people, and Ralston, the present Shakespeare, was a stopping place. Burro Springs was the only water in the immediate territory, and was a stopping place for man, beast, and the devil himself on his way to Mogollons. We sold water, food supplies, mining supplies, and kept rooms for the travelers.

We looked on the desperado type as protection in those days. Curly Bill and other such characters were always welcome to such outlying places as when these men were staying at the place we never expected any trouble and we felt that we were safe from the Indians, for the Indians respected these supposed to be gunmen.

Curly Bill was a handsome man his reputation might have been bad, but he had his good points as well. The bad man of the yesterday was not bad by nature as a rule. They were victims of circumstances. In most cases they were men that were mistreated and abused

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by some party until they were cornered, and forced to kill to save their life or property. Rather than let the law be their judge they would hide out, and sooner or later be forced to kill again, then it wouldn't be long until they would be an outcast from society, and a desperado.

Curly Bill as we knew him was quiet and when he came to the Springs stayed off to himself. He was called Curly from the fact that he wore long hair. He never did us any harm, but always seemed to be our friend. As to whether he was connected with the "San Simon Gang" I very seriously have my doubts, but I do know that he worked for Harvey Whitehill, and was loyal to the man.

Curly Bill was at our place one time just after we had returned from Apache Tejo with some of our cattle that had been stolen. We had recovered all of our stock, but five cows, Curley sit listening to our misfortune shaking and nodding his head. The next mornings Curly left the Springs and five days later came in with our five cows, and that is the way the supposed to be bad man did his friend a favor, there wasn't any talking to be done they believed in action and talking later.

When Curly left this part of the southwest in 1885 he was supposed to have gone into Arizona and gotten into trouble and killed, but this is false for I sold cattle to him after the World War. After the war we couldn't find buyers for our stock and buyers were begged to buy, and were enticed in every way possible to look at our stock. A group of buyers were over at the corrals, by the McGomas Tree, looking at our cattle, I noticed one of the buyers from California looked familiar to me. We eyed one another for some time; finally the fellow came over to me and said: "Did you know Harvey Whitehill?"

I quickly replied "I did and I know you." "He smiled and nodded his head. He had been able to start life over after he was reported killed, and he wasn't the only bad man that was killed to become leaders of the country. The country was so sparcely settled that they could go into a new place and start a new life.

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Russian Bill and King that were hung at Ralston were not desperados, but bullies they would go into town and get drunk and shoot up the town. One time while shooting up the town King was shot through the back of the neck. Russian Bill used the old Indian method of putting salt on the wound and pouring whiskey on over the salt. The first application burned like the devil, but later the whiskey deadened the pain.

King finally came to after Bill had kept hot rock all around him for several days, and kept up the use of salt and whiskey. After King completely recovered the two men decided to give the town of Ralston a day to remember.

The two men went to town and got drunk Sandy King picked a quarrel with Harry Mess, a clerk in the Carol Brothers 5 store and shot his finger off. King was arrested and guarded by Jack Rutland behind the saloon. Russian Bill stole a horse and went to Deming here he was arrested and returned to Ralston. Both these bullies were now prisoners for Jack to guard. One night Russian Bill was singing "Climbing Those Golden Stairs," and the men decided that when Jack brought his prisoners in with their blankets they would give the men a chance to see Saint Peter, and sing "Climbing Those Golden Stairs" to him for they were tired of their pranks.

The men took the blankets that the two men slept on and threw them over the heads of Russian Bill and Sandy King. They took the two men down to the old hotel and hung them. These men weren't men that were respected as outlaws, but men that tried to run over people. The weren't rustlers or killers as so many of the men that made the frontier a safe place, but a modern bully.

When we settled at Burro Springs the road that you just came over in Gold Gulch was between twenty and thirty feet deeper than it is today. We travel now down the bed of the creek in an hours time. Fifty years ago the bed was made up of willows and cottonwood trees. It took a day to travel down the bank as one never could get in the bed as it was deep with vertical banks. Gold was plentiful in nugget form. There is some gold today

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but it is a starvation for a living now, as the nuggets are all small. The gold here from all probability is meter gold and a mother lode will never be found. The country has been prospected in for over one hundred years and a vein 6 has never been found yet. People still come to the valley to placer mine and pan the gold in the creek bed. You can see their cave dwellings along the bank of the gulch.

Since I have come to Grant County I have had to learn to speak the English language. In the old town of Mesilla there were only three white children, and the rest were of a Spanish and Indian descent. Spanish was spoken altogether. Donna—the pottery maker of the town, was our nearest neighbor. She didn't have any children and she was my teacher until we left the valley. I spoke the language as a native and English was difficult to learn. Today I use some Spanish phrases as I can't find an English phrase to express my meaning.

Geronimo and I have had a few friendly exchange of shots. I was never in a real battle with him, but one time as he came across our pasture he took a few shots at me and I returned the volley.

In 1872 the soldiers found an Indian baby left to die beside the trail. The Indians had been in a combat with a wagon train and the party had all been killed. The baby was the only one of the group that escaped. The soldiers picked up the Indian child and took him in with them to the Mimbres. There the John Miller family took the child to raise. The boy proved to be an intelligent child, but cruel. When he was twelve years he was caught in the act of dashing the brains in of one of the Miller children with a hatchet. The child was at once returned to the San Carlos reservation, after having been with an American family for eleven years.

There were many things happened in the early days, life was uncertain, but they were good old days. People had much respect for others and were ready to help those in need.

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